

RESISTING POLARIZATION, REVITALIZING AMERICA

A PRE-ELECTION CURRICULUM



The 2024 election cycle has begun. Each presidential campaign cycle seems to be more contentious than the last and this one is no different. We're bracing for months of misleading TV ads, apocalyptic fundraising emails, and rough dinner table arguments.

Presidential elections make the nation's already-extreme political polarization even worse. Polarization is when people sort themselves into two opposing sides and erase all the complexity of the issues at hand, treating one another less and less humanely. Almost any difference can become polarized.

Partisan polarization (Democrats versus Republicans) is especially harmful to the nation. It turns our huge, complicated, diverse democracy into a political sport where everyone has to pick a side and only one side can ever win.

Polarization might look like a shouting match between neighbors. It might look like people avoiding political conversations. Both are harmful. We have to be able to talk about our hopes, fears, values, and perspectives with dignity and honesty. This is not just damaging relationships. Polarization makes it impossible to co-create policies on issues that matter.

In this four-part, scaffolded, self-paced curriculum, we will help you develop the internal capacities, skills, and confidence you need to become a positive force in conversations around the election where you live, work, worship, and learn. We recommend completing all four exercises if you have time.

- ❑ EXERCISE 1: FINDING YOUR BEST POLITICAL SELF
- ❑ EXERCISE 2: PRACTICING HARD CONVERSATIONS
- ❑ EXERCISE 3: BUILDING TRUST & UNDERSTANDING
- ❑ EXERCISE 4: CONNECTION, COMMUNITY & CHANGE



EXERCISE 1: FINDING YOUR BEST POLITICAL SELF

Skill: Reflection · **Time:** 30 minutes

Election campaigns tell us who to fear and who to trust, who to exclude, what to say, and what to believe. Although we never feel more divided than we do at the height of these campaigns, soon it will be the day after the election. We'll return to life, work, worship, and school, and we'll need to do that together. We will need to solve new problems together. We will need to help and reconnect with one another.

The first step to resisting polarization is to ground yourself in your authentic values and the person you want to be in your community. Through the exercise below, you'll reflect on the lived experiences and relationships that shaped your political values and beliefs.

[Click here to download the exercise](#)

[This exercise](#) is designed to help you find your best political self. What values do you want to live out? What matters most? Who do you feel called to connect with amid this polarizing time?

When you feel grounded in the values, experiences, and people that have shaped your political perspectives, you'll feel less reactive and defensive in the face of different values, perspectives, and identities. When you know who you are, it gives you the capacity to see others for who they are.

In the next step, we'll help you practice a new way of engaging across differences—by practicing with someone you trust and know well.

As always, reach out to us for help or guidance. We are here.



EXERCISE 2: PRACTICING HARD CONVERSATIONS

Skill: Reflection & Speaking · **Time:** 25 minutes

Practice, unfortunately, does not make perfect in this case—but it can help you develop key dialogue skills and build resilience to the pull of polarizing behaviors.

Conversations about difficult topics can be emotional and messy. By practicing how you want to talk about these topics, you'll be more prepared when you enter into a conversation with people you don't know as well, people who fall into polarized habits, or people whose views and values differ sharply from your own.

In this exercise, you'll practice two key skills: sharing your perspective and getting curious about other people's views. You'll do this in a first-draft conversation with someone you feel comfortable with. It might be a close friend, family member, or mentor, but it should be someone with whom you'll feel no temptation to argue, debate, or change their mind. It should be someone you trust, who can listen to you with generosity, empathy, and patience.

We also hope this first draft conversation helps you feel heard and understood, so you feel more energized to offer others the same gift.

[This exercise](#) is designed for one-on-one conversations. You'll need time and space to reach a level of depth that only comes with patience. Start slow. Make sure both people have an opportunity to talk about what matters most.

[Click here to download the exercise](#)

In exercise three, you'll be invited to stretch your comfort zone. And after grounding yourself in your values and this first-draft conversation, you'll be ready.



EXERCISE 3: BUILDING TRUST & UNDERSTANDING

Skill: Listening & Holding Space · **Time:** 30 minutes

This exercise will help you have a conversation with someone who holds a different political perspective than most people in their context. Think about someone in your neighborhood, school, workplace, or faith community who feels isolated or out of step. Maybe they also hold a different perspective than you—but that's not essential.

Reach out to invite them into a one-on-one conversation. Be clear about your purpose: to understand their experience as someone with a different perspective. This first discussion isn't designed to tackle specific issues. It is to help you both understand what makes these conversations so hard for so many people.

[This exercise](#) will help you enter that conversation in a way that lets the other person feel like they can share their perspective openly and vulnerably. Conversations like this are often a part of the community mapping we do in the early stages of community collaborations.

[Click here to download the resource](#)

By practicing the art of holding space for others, you are exercising a crucial skill for community-building, public discourse, and civic life. We need to engage with diverse perspectives in a way that leads to connection and mutual understanding, so we need people who can help us do that together. That involves you understanding your own convictions and communicating in a way that can be heard. It also involves making space for people to share their views, especially when they have different perspectives.

In the next exercise, we'll give you a tool to have a conversation across political differences—and to incorporate these skills into the rest of your life.



EXERCISE 4: CONNECTION, COMMUNITY & CHANGE

Skill: Dialogue Across Differences · **Time:** 45+ minutes

All the pieces are in place. You've reflected on your values. You can articulate your perspective as well as the experiences that led you to them. You have felt what it's like to be fully heard. You've practiced deep listening and genuinely curious questions.

[This resource](#) pulls them together and challenges you to deploy them in a conversation about a difference of political perspectives.

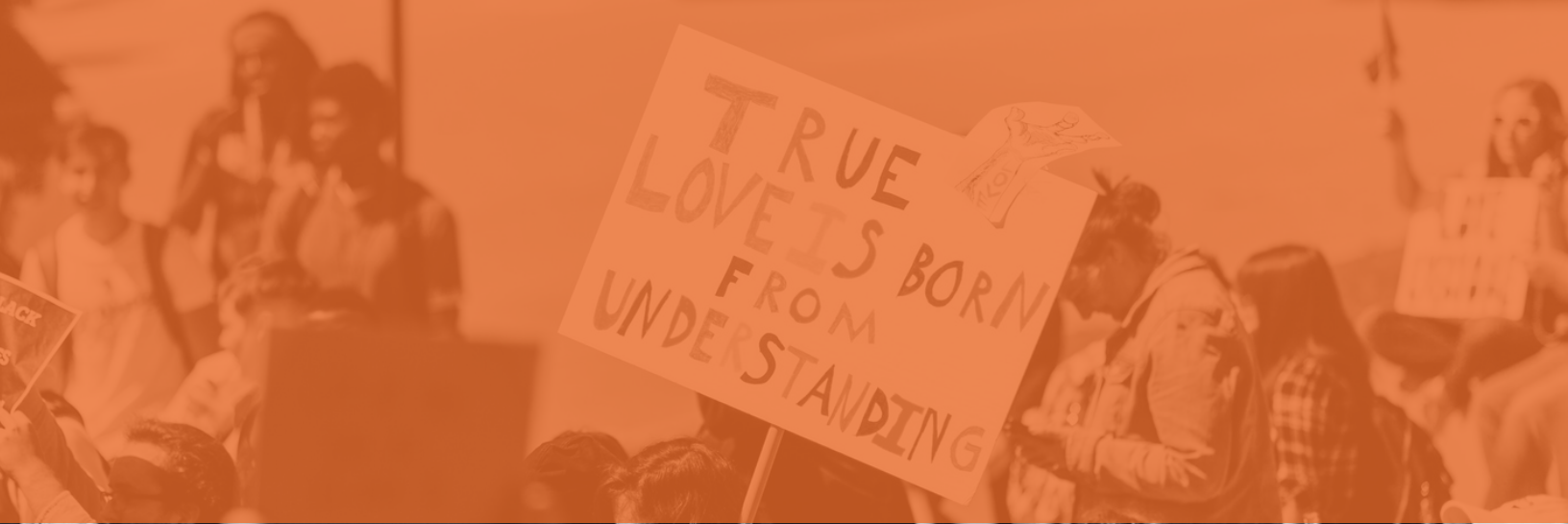
[Click here to download the resource](#)

Understanding the cycles of communication outlined in this exercise will help you disrupt the polarization and division that peaks during an election season. You might begin with a one-on-one chat with someone who holds a different viewpoint, or a group conversation with members of your family, class, book club, workplace, or faith community.

Whatever the setting, you'll be able to apply the framework in this week's resource to support more constructive dialogue about the election—and in conversations to come.

This is our final challenge to you: take what you've built and make it part of your life.

You are a powerful force to improve the way people connect, communicate, and disagree in the places where you live, work, worship, and learn. Return to the four exercises in this series whenever you need to. Remember that you can always reach out to us for additional resources, training, or guidance.



WELCOME TO THE MOVEMENT!

Good news! You aren't in this alone.

Hundreds of thousands of people engage in exercises like the ones we're sharing here every year. We provide in-depth training for thousands more every year. We work with big organizations, governments, and universities as well as small congregations, teachers, and local leaders just like you.

If you'd like more help, or have a question about putting our approach to work in your community, school, or organization, here are three steps you can take:

- [1. Reach out to us for a free call with an EP expert](#)
- [2. Attend an EP workshop](#)
- [3. Download more guides and resources from the website](#)

We are always here to support people like you, who are mending their community.